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Tips to Reduce Your Summer Electric Bill

For most consumers, electric bills increase in the summer because of increased air conditioner use. While consumers can save money and help the environment year-round by taking simple steps to use energy more wisely, doing so in the summer can make an even bigger difference on electric bills. These are just a few of the things consumers can do:

Use fans to circulate air throughout your home to increase comfort without the expense of increased air conditioner use. Ceiling fans, in particular, can greatly increase air circulation and comfort. While a fan does use electricity, it uses much less than an air conditioner.

On your air conditioner:

- Set the thermostat at the highest comfortable temperature and dress appropriately.
- When leaving your home for a few hours or going to bed at night, raise the thermostat a few degrees. Thermostats that perform this function automatically can be purchased for as little as \$30 and will automatically return your home or business to the desired temperature before you return.
- Keep lamps, TVs and other heat-generating appliances away from the thermostat and minimize their use on especially hot days. Any heat introduced into your home or business will have to be removed by the air conditioner.
- Maintain your air conditioner properly. Older air conditioners and those that are not maintained may run less efficiently, wasting more energy and costing you more money. It is important to change the filter regularly, keep vents clean, avoid blocking the intake vents, dust the thermostat regularly and follow maintenance guidelines as recommended by the manufacturer.

Use compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs, especially in light fixtures that are used for extended periods of time.

- CFL bulbs use as little as 1/4 the amount of electricity used by traditional incandescent bulbs, while creating the same amount of light.
- CFL bulbs create very little heat when compared to incandescent bulbs, reducing the amount of work required of your air conditioner.
- Although CFL bulbs are slightly more expensive, they save money in the long run because of their low electricity use and extra long life.

When using a window air conditioner, eliminate air leaks between the air conditioner and the window with foam insulation or weather stripping.

Check weather stripping, caulking and seals around doors and windows. Remember that even a small crack or hole can lead to the same air loss as an open window.

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Proper insulation is critical to maintaining an energy efficient home.

- Make sure the attic, all exterior walls and floors are properly insulated, along with basements or crawl spaces (if applicable).
- Make sure your insulation carries the proper rating for the region you live in. For houses in Indiana, the U.S. Department of Energy recommends insulation with ratings between R-38 and R-49 in the ceilings and between R-18 and R-22 in the walls. More information is available at your local hardware store and from the Department of Energy's Insulation Fact Sheet (Available online at <http://www.ornl.gov/roofs+walls/insulation>).
- Indiana homeowners who add new insulation, weather stripping, storm doors/windows or double-pane windows may qualify for an insulation deduction (of up to \$1000) on their state income taxes. For more information, contact the Indiana Department of Revenue's district office for your area or visit the Department's Website at <http://www.IN.gov/dor>.

Close storm windows and doors to keep hot air out and cool air in.

Close blinds, shades and draperies facing the sun to keep heat out.

- White blinds, shades and curtains reflect sunlight (unlike dark colors which absorb it).
- Consider reflective films for windows that face south.

Minimize the use of ovens, stoves, washers, dryers and other major appliances that generate heat on very hot days.

- On days when the temperature reaches 90 degrees or more, it is best to wait until after 6:00 pm before cooking, doing laundry or washing dishes.
- Microwave ovens, pressure cookers and outdoor grills use less energy than regular stoves and ovens.

Reduce the thermostat on your electric (or gas) water heater.

Turn off all unnecessary lights.

Turn off computers, monitors and other home electronics (including TVs, VCRs and stereos) when you are not using them.

If you are planning to be away from home and want to have lights or appliances turned on for security reasons, use a timer.

When shopping for appliances, shop around and look for energy efficient products. Products with the Energy Star label operate well above minimum energy efficiency standards.

Landscaping, if done properly, can also make your home more energy efficient.

- Air conditioners will work more efficiently when shaded by trees or shrubs. However, make sure the trees and shrubs do not block the airflow.
- By planting trees on the west and south sides of your yard, you can shade your home from sunlight during the hottest parts of the day.
- While landscaping, keep in mind that rocks and cement will hold and radiate heat.

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